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ABSTRACT

The STAR System is a developmental guidance approach to be used with elementary school children in the 5th or 6th grades. Two basic purposes underlie STAR: to increase learning potential and to enhance personal growth and development. STAR refers to 4 basic skills: sensory, thinking, adapting, and revising. Major components of the 4 skills are: (1) Sensing--observation and listening; (2) Thinking--goal setting, planning, weighing and choosing; (3) Adapting--try out, examination and judgment; and (4) Revising--readapting and comparing. Elements related to the use of STAR which are now under study include: group size, co-leadership, age level, materials and methods to be used and number of sessions required. (Author)

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S T A R SYSTEM

Look back upon your life and ask the following questions: "What very important, useful behaviors do I now possess that I wish I could have learned earlier?" "Are there a few basic skills that I developed the hard way that could have become a part of me when I was a child?" Most of us would answer these questions positively. We might differ when we attempted to state the basics that are crucial to successful, satisfying behavior, but nevertheless we would agree that such fundamentals exist. Also we might not agree upon the best developmental time period for learning the fundamentals, but we would agree that a conscious attempt to instill them early is better than leaving their development to chance through hit-or-miss circumstances.

The STAR System represents an effort to introduce elementary children to four basic skills, which if developed would not only improve their learning potential in school but would also enhance their personal growth and development. Sensing, Thinking, Adapting and Revising are four basic skills which are crucial to learning and personal development. Let's first examine these fundamentals and then point out one way to develop them during the elementary school years.

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SENSING

Sensing in its broadest sense includes receiving a multitude of impressions through the five components of our sensory apparatus, and attaching "meanings" to these impressions. In our culture, two of the five senses are strongly appealed to and therefore deserve special consideration. Seeing and hearing, or stated more appropriately, observing and listening are the sensing skills which we need to enhance in younger children.

Regarding observation, younger children would benefit immensely, if given an opportunity to learn to observe more fully and more accurately. For example, experiences related to developing observation skills include concentrating attention, sensing the elements of a whole, noting changes in the position of the elements of a whole, and sensing the differences and similarities among wholes. Practicing these observational skills under supervision then ingrains the behavior and makes it potentially useful.

Experiences related to listening might include becoming familiar with numerous common sounds in the environment, sensing the key element in a spoken message and noting feeling tones in spoken and musical passages. Once again supervised practice must follow the initial exercises. After sufficient practice in observing and listening the youngster is ready to begin developing formal skills related to thinking.

THINKING

People think in many ways, using a variety of skills which they have acquired intentionally or incidentally. While certain thinking skills appear to work in some situations but not in others, four such skills which are basic to most situations are setting goals, planning, weighing and choosing.

Under appropriate conditions, youngsters can learn to express their needs and desires in terms of goals and to divide overall goals into subgoals. Once a goal has been set the youngster has something definitive to work toward and it then becomes possible for him to sense progress.

Possessing a clear goal, the youngster then engages in planning. What are the possible ways he might achieve his goal? Minimum difficulty will be experienced in planning if the previously defined goal is realistic, i.e., capable of being achieved by the child at his current developmental level. Difficulty is further reduced if the youngster is encouraged, at this point, to develop only two plans which might lead to goal achievement. While more than 2 plans would be available in many instances, multiple plans only lead to confusion when the youngster next engages in weighing and choosing.

Weighing involves placing values upon the two plans. By learning to ask specific, concrete questions, the youngster is able to place weights or values upon the element of each plan.

For example: "Which will take the longest to do?" "Which will be easier to do?" "How much will other persons have to help me to carry out each plan?" "What materials are needed for each plan?" "Can I get the materials easily?" etc. Answering such questions regarding each of the two plans results in one appearing to be better than the other and the youngster then chooses it as his favorite.

Before making his choice between plans 1 and 2, the youngster is led to understand that his choice may not be final. He may wish to return to the remaining plan later. That this is understood is important as flexibility is an essential feature of choosing or decision-making. Hesitation and blocking seldom occur when choice-making is perceived as a flexible process. Goal set, plans made, weighed and choice decided upon, the youngster then progresses to adapting.

ADAPTING

In order to cope with ever-changing situations it is necessary to develop adaptation skills. Intellectually and logically, our plan may seem first-rate but may not succeed when applied to a "real-life" situation. The process of adapting includes trying out, examining the outcome and making a judgment as to effectiveness.

In many instances it is beneficial to simulate the try-out before putting it to the actual test. Role-playing, one-to-one

and in small subgroups, not only leads to refinement of form but to increased self-assurance on the part of the youngster. The actual try-out then follows and leads to an examination and judgment of the outcome.

When examining the outcome it is not enough merely to ask "Did it work?" Once again concrete, specific questions must be posed. For example, "What did the other person(s) do and say when I carried out the plan?" "What happened after I tried out the plan?" "How did I feel afterwards? -- good, unhappy, dissatisfied, pleased"? "Should I do it again but differently?" or "Should I try Plan 2?" Answers to these and other similar questions prepare the youngster to judge the effectiveness of his action. If the action is deemed successful, adaption has occurred and the goal has been attained. If the action is judged as only partially successful or not successful, adaption is insufficient and it is necessary to move to Revision.

REVISION

Two major options are available during the Revision phase. Plan 1, if judged partially effective may be revised and further refined or in the event of Plan 1 failure, Plan 2 is put into effect by returning to the Adaptation phase and proceeding as outlined previously -- role-play, tryout, examination and judgment.

If Plan 1 revised works or if Plan 2 works, or if both Plans 1 and 2 fail, in all cases, we are now ready to ask the questions, "Why did it work?" or "Why didn't it work?" In most cases, answers are arrived at through comparison.

In analyzing the success or failure of Plans 1 and 2 through comparison we are concerned with similarities and dissimilarities that are discovered. For example, let us say that Plan 1 failed but Plan 1 Revised succeeded and a dissimilarity between the two was that more detailed role playing was present before Plan 1 revised was put into effect. This then is perhaps one of the reasons Plan 1 Revised succeeded while Plan 1 failed. Most reasons for failure are of course located in the first three phases of the STAR process --Inadequate sensing, inappropriate thinking and faulty adaptation.

Summarizing then, Sensing, Thinking, Adapting and Revising are important fundamentals, useful in school learning and in personal development. Other fundamentals should come into play at the Jr. High School level and form an extension of the STAR system. Such processes as forming analogies, generalizing and analyzing, and simple synthesizing while developmentally inappropriate at the elementary level could probably be successfully introduced during the Jr. High years. But since our concern here is with elementary school children, let's proceed to examine one way of applying the STAR system.

COOPERATIVE EFFORT

I suggest that counselors and selected teachers together plan and carry out the STAR system. The counselors role is one of coordinator-helper. He explains and discusses STAR with a small group of selected teachers; together they develop methods, materials, and either singly or in teams they offer the program to youngsters. This type of cooperative endeavor between counselors and teachers must become characteristic of elementary school counseling, not just to make elementary counseling different from secondary counseling, but because effectiveness is usually increased through cooperative efforts and thereby more children benefit.

SUGGESTED FORMAT

Since STAR is a developmentally-oriented system, it is for all children. Developmental age is important and it appears that children in the upper elementary grades may benefit from such an approach. Except in unusual circumstances, children in the early elementary years will not have attained sufficient readiness to benefit from STAR.

In order that the program may be tailored to a particular school, it is suggested that a small-scale try out be conducted before instituting a full scale program for all students. For example, select about 25 children from one of the upper grades, half boys, half girls, who are average in ability and achievement.

The counselor and one teacher develop a minimum set of materials and decide upon methods of executing the subsequent steps in the STAR system. Use one block of time per school day of about 30 - 40 minutes, operate as a 2-member team. Continue the program until each youngster in the group has successfully completed the STAR system. It is difficult to say how many weeks will be involved as this will vary from group to group and school to school. However, a fair estimate is about 8 to 12 weeks (40 to 60 sessions). Children, teacher and counselor evaluate the program at completion and any weaknesses in method, practice, and materials may be corrected before the program is offered on a larger scale.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, what may we as counselors do to help many elementary children, not just those who are troubled and in need of remedial assistance? The STAR system is one developmental approach toward this end. It proposes to enhance the lives of upper elementary children by providing them with fundamental skills in Sensing, Thinking, Adapting and Revising, which will lead to improved school learning and satisfying personal development. Why not give STAR a try in your school?